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SUBJECT: AH, THE "O'S!" - A VISIT TO OGUN, OYO, OSUN, AND ONDO STATES (PART 3 OF 4)

REF: A) LAGOS 1205 B) LAGOS 1203

1. Summary. This is the third of a four-part report on ConOffs visit to four of the five former Alliance for Democracy Party (AD) States, that were taken by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2003 and 2004 federal, state and local elections. (Parts 1 and 2 at reftels B and A) After one year under new administrations, all four States seem to be making progress in delivering critical government services such as free education, poverty alleviation and infrastructure improvements. Osun State, under the measured and confident control of retired general, Governor Olunsoye Oyinlola, is moving ahead on infrastructure projects after six months of planning by State officials and community representatives. The fact that Oyinlola was an official in the military regime of the late Sani Abacha still causes his actions to be closely scrutinized for abuses and compared to the Abacha era. End summary.

Osun - "The State of Young Faces"

2. (SBU) Osun was carved out of the old Oyo State in 1991; thus, like Oyo, its population is almost totally ethnic Yoruba. Osun officials readily admit that the State is about 50-50 Muslim to Christian. However, casual observation of residents on the street and the ratio of well-maintained mosques to, obviously, older and aging churches leads to a supposition that Osun may have a much higher percentage of Muslims.

3. (SBU) The major highway into Osun's capital, Osogbo, is in excellent condition. Amazingly, along the entire length that we traveled, the two-lane highway is being repaired and widened to a four-lane highway. Heavy equipment and road crews were at work clearing the road shoulders and laying asphalt. Except for the inevitable traffic jam, this one caused by an accident involving two sixteen-wheeler tank trucks, and the slowdowns for the ubiquitous police check points, our trip to Osogbo was fast and smooth.

The Governor is also a Prince

4. (SBU) Governor Prince Olunsoye Oyinlola made time for us, even though we arrived a half an hour late due to the tanker accident. The waiting room outside the Governor's office was packed with men carrying briefcases and folders of papers, obviously waiting for meetings with the Governor. The Governor had a tight schedule, but we were immediately ushered into his vast and ornately decorated office on the top floor of the State executive office building. Oyinlola had arranged a formal press meeting with prepared welcoming statements, photographers and video cameras, assembly members (including the lone AD Assemblyman) and an exchange of gifts. PolOff had a chance to speak one-on-one with the Governor after the welcoming ceremony. Oyinlola appeared open and friendly, and he answered all our questions as fully as time permitted. He said his administration is concentrating on poverty eradication and job creation in Osun. As in other States in the federation, government -- local, State, or federal -- is the largest employer. Oyinlola told us that 79% of the State budget goes to the 5% of the population who are government employees. There are no US businesses, franchises or partnerships operating in Osun, and the Oyinlola administration wants US help in changing that situation. The Governor said that Osun is perfect for foreign and local investment; i. e. it has no crime or other security issues, a good infrastructure, and an educated population.

Making progress, but the past still haunts him

5. (SBU) Osun is another of the non-oil-producing States that has turned to revitalization of its agricultural industry as a way to cut dependence on oil revenue allocations. The State has purchased 330 new tractors that will be sold or leased to farmers. Oyinlola told us his administration has secured government funding to improve the supply of potable water in the State, and has funded improvements in the delivery of health care services from its

current federal allocation. Osun has hired 1,500 additional health care workers, purchased 31 new ambulances and is in the process of constructing its own pharmaceuticals plant. This administration has re-hired 2,500 teachers laid off by the previous administration, and raised wages for 18,000 teachers under a new program called the "Oyinlola Corps." The Governor said that all State payments to civil service and pensioners are now current.

16. (SBU) Oyinlola is a retired general and was the former military administrator of Lagos State during the rule of the late military dictator, Sani Abacha. He has had to try to live down his history, but his critics in Osun point to wasteful spending such as purchasing motorcycles and cars for political supporters, and taking the entire House of Assembly with him to Brazil, the UK and the US to purchase the tractors for the agricultural development project. Oyinlola counters that the equipment manufacturers paid for the travel.

HINSON-JONES